

Thomas Jefferson to George Hammond, February 16, 1793, with Copy , from The Works of Thomas Jefferson in Twelve Volumes. Federal Edition. Collected and Edited by Paul Leicester Ford.

TO THE BRITISH MINISTER J. MSS. (GEORGE HAMMOND)

Philadelphia Feb. 16, 1793.

Sir, —I have duly received your letter of yesterday with the statement of the duties payable on articles imported into Great Britain. The Object of the Report, from which I had communicated some extracts to you, not requiring a minute detail of the several duties on every article, in every country, I had presented both articles & duties in groups, & in general terms, conveying information sufficiently accurate for the Object. And I have the satisfaction to find, on reexamining the expressions in the Report, that they correspond with your statement as nearly as generals can with particulars. The difference which any nation makes between our commodities & those of other countries, whether favorable or unfavorable to us, were proper to be noted: but they were subordinate to the more important questions What countries *consume* most of our produce? exact the lightest duties? and leave to us the most favorable balance?

You seem to think that in the mention made of your *official* communication of Apr. 11, 1792, that the clause in the Navigation act (prohibiting our own produce to be carried in our own vessels into the British European dominions) would be strictly enforced in future, and the *private belief* expressed at the same time that the intention of that court did not go so far, that the latter terms are not sufficiently accurate. About the fact it is impossible we should differ, because it is a written one. The only difference then must be a

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merely verbal one. For thus stands the fact. In your letter of Apr. 11, you say you have received, by a circular dispatch from your court directions to inform this government that it had been determined in future strictly to enforce this clause of the navigation act. This I consider as an *official* notification. In your answer of Apr. 12, to my request of explanation, you say "in answer to your letter of this day, I have the honor of observing that I have no other instructions upon the subject of my communication than such as are contained in the circular dispatch of which I stated the purport in my letter dated yesterday. I have however no difficulty in assuring you that the result of my

personal conviction is that the determination of his Majesty's government to enforce the clause of the act &c. is not intended to militate against the Proclamation &c." This *personal conviction* is expressed in the Report as a *private belief* in contradistinction to the *official* declaration. In your letter of yesterday you chose to call it "a formal assurance of your conviction." As I am not scrupulous about words, when they are once explained, I feel no difficulty in substituting in the Report, your own words "*personal conviction*" for those of "*private belief*" which I had thought equivalent. I cannot indeed insert that it was a *formal* assurance, lest some readers might confound this with an *official* one, without reflecting that you could not mean to give *official* assurance that the clause would be enforced, & *official* assurance at the same time of your personal conviction that it would not be enforced.

I had the honor to acknowledge verbally the receipt of your letter of the 3d of August, when you did me that of making the enquiry verbally about six weeks ago: and I beg leave to assure you that I am with due respect, Sir, Your most obed't & most humble serv't.¹

¹ There is also another letter of the same date and tenor as the above, endorsed, "not sent," which differs only verbally except in its last paragraph, which reads as follows:

"I had the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 3d of August, when you did me that of making the enquiry verbally about six weeks ago, but to the remaining

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interrogatory, whether I 'ever laid it before the two houses of legislature'? I will take my answer from an authority to which I am sure you will subscribe, & which is so replete with good sense & it's terms so well chosen, that I need seek nothing out of it. 'I must therefore observe to you, Sir, that in my quality of Secretary of State to the United States, I cannot receive any communication on the part of foreign ministers but for the purpose of laying it before the President, and of taking his orders upon it; & that the deliberations of the two houses of legislature as well as the communications, which it may please the President to make to them, relative to the affairs of this country, are objects entirely foreign from all diplomatic consequence, and upon which it is impossible for me to enter into any discussion whatever with ministers of other countries.'"